

## COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 15, 2017

### REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WETLANDS RECOVERY PROJECT

Project No. 97-001-02

Project Manager: Megan Cooper

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Augment the Conservancy's June 25, 2015 authorization to disburse an additional amount of up to \$27,679 to the Aquatic Science Center for technical assistance needed to update the 2001 *Regional Strategy* for the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project, affecting the counties of San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara.

**LOCATION:** Coastal wetlands and watersheds from Point Conception in Santa Barbara County south to the international border with Mexico (Exhibit 1).

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Resource Enhancement

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#### **EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: [Project Location – WRP Region and Current Projects](#)

Exhibit 2: [Conservancy Authorization June 25, 2015](#)

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#### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111, and 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby augments its June 25, 2015 authorization to disburse an additional amount of up to twenty-seven thousand, six hundred seventy-nine dollars (\$27,679) to the Aquatic Science Center (ASC) for technical assistance needed to update the 2001 Regional Strategy for the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project. This authorization remains subject to the conditions of its June 25, 2015 authorization.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that the proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's findings in its June 25, 2015 authorization with respect to the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, and the Conservancy's most recent Strategic Plan.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy augment its June 25, 2015 authorization (Exhibit 2) to disburse an additional amount of up to \$27,679 to the Aquatic Science Center (“ASC”) for technical assistance needed to update the 2001 *Regional Strategy* for the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (“WRP”). The requested augmentation is for additional funds needed to compile, format and print the *Regional Strategy* report. The funding for the *Regional Strategy* to date has been approximately 31% federal funding (see “Project Finance” section, below).

The *Regional Strategy* will be a guidance document for selecting and designing site-specific restoration projects using data on historical ecology, current conditions, and predicted sea-level rise. The final product of the *Regional Strategy* will include a professionally formatted report containing key visualization products, major scientific findings, and management recommendations. These products will also be available digitally through an interactive web tool that is being developed through a different grant. The *Regional Strategy* will be completed in fall 2017.

The *Regional Strategy* development is a highly collaborative process bringing together 18 resource and regulatory agencies, non-profits and consultants, and a science advisory panel of twelve wetland experts from across California. All of these groups share a cooperative mission to protect, restore, and enhance Southern California’s coastal wetland resources.

ASC is a Joint Powers Authority created by the State Water Resources Control Board and the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies to assist with the promotion and delivery of science support functions and information management for governmental and non-governmental organizations. ASC is administered by the San Francisco Estuary Institute (“SFEI”). The ASC has been successfully leading the scientific efforts to develop the *Regional Strategy* for the past two years.

**Site Description:** The project area includes the WRP region, consisting of the coastal wetlands and watersheds within the counties of San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara. The region spans from Point Conception south to the U.S./Mexico border (see Exhibit 1).

**Project History:** The WRP is a broad-based partnership established in 1997 that is chaired by the California Natural Resources Agency Director and staffed by the Conservancy staff. The Conservancy has provided financial, technical and in-kind staff support to the WRP since its inception in 1997. There are 18 member agencies of the WRP, including thirteen State and five Federal agencies. WRP partners include non-profits, scientists, and local communities. In 2001, the WRP published its *Regional Strategy*, which is the guidance document that explains that WRP’s restoration, conservation and scientific goals. The *Regional Strategy* needs to be updated to reflect new data and information and contemporary approaches to ecological restoration. Incorporating an understanding of how climate change will impact our approach to restoration is a primary impetus for updating the *Regional Strategy*.

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The Conservancy received a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Landscape Conservation Cooperative to develop the sea level rise adaptation strategies for the *Regional Strategy* in October 2014, and granted these funds to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project on January 29, 2015. In September 2014, the Conservancy was awarded a grant from the U.S. EPA to update the *Regional Strategy*, and granted these funds to ASC on June 25, 2015 (see Exhibit 2).

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Fund Source</b>	<b>Conservancy Authorization</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Coastal Conservancy	June 25, 2015	\$206,350
U.S. EPA Grant to Conservancy	June 25, 2015	\$93,650
TOTAL TO DATE		\$300,000
<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>CURRENT REQUEST</b>	<b>\$27,679</b>

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84, Public Resources Code sections 75001 *et seq.*). Proposition 84 allows for the utilization of funds for expenditures pursuant to Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as specified in Section 75060(b). Pursuant to Section 75060(b), funds may be allocated for the resource enhancement and protection of coastal and marine water quality and habitats, so long as the project meets the requirements of Division 21 of the Public Resource Code. The *Regional Strategy* project will be a guidance document for selecting and designing site-specific coastal resource enhancement and restoration projects using data on historical ecology, current conditions, and predicted sea-level rise.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's June 25, 2015 authorization with respect to the Conservancy's enabling legislation (See Exhibit 2).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2013  
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's June 25, 2015 authorization with respect to the Conservancy's Strategic Plan (See Exhibit 2).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on October 2, 2014 (See Exhibit 2).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CALIFORNIA COASTAL ACT POLICIES:**

The proposed project remains consistent with the Conservancy's June 25, 2015 authorization with respect to the Local Coastal Program Policies (See Exhibit 2).

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

In the Conservancy's June 25, 2015 authorization, the project was categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 Class 6, which consists of "basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource." (See Exhibit 2). Concurrent with the June 2015 authorization, staff filed a Notice of Exemption for the project.

This proposed augmentation only increases funding for the same exempted project that has not been changed or altered. The augmentation of funding does not have a possible significant environmental effect as defined in CEQA (See 14 Cal. Code of Regs Section 15382). Therefore, CEQA requires no new analysis or compliance for the approval of additional funding for this project.

Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of this authorization.